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Spies: How the Good Guys Finally Lose

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Fifteen years ago, James Bond was an authentic American folk hero. The President of the United States let it be known that he avidly read the Bond books, and the country gloried in the adventures of the fictional British spy who worked so closely with our own CIA.

Now, the actor who played Bond, Sean Connery, is starring in a new American film called "The Next Man," and the CIA is trying to kill him. Connery is still the hero, however. He obviously has come a long way from his days of battling Pussy Galore. So have the rest of us.

The CIA is no longer perceived as the unambiguous force for good in the world that it appeared to be before Vietnam, Watergate and the continuing inteligence scandals. In the old days, James Bond killed and otherwise did violence to people who seemed to threaten our national security. We applauded wildly—and probably still would—when Bond blocked assassination attempts by demonic Soviet agents and saved the world from nuclear blackmail by an outlaw syndicate. Today, the moviegoing public has more information about what the CIA actually does. It knows that the CIA has employed killers every bit as ruthless as the Soviets' and that the Agency, at least in the drive to eliminate Castro, allied itself with the Mafia, the biggest criminals of them all, in plots to murder real live people.

In "The Next Man," now at area theaters, the audience roots against the CIA and—somewhat improbably—for the Saudi Arabians. Connery plays the Saudi Minister of State who comes up with a visionary plan for ending strife in the Middle East and bringing prosperity to the Third World. (While I have no idea what a Saudi minister really acts like, I happen to enjoy Sean Connery and am perfectly willing to take his powerful presence at face value.) Connery as the Saudi appears before the United Nations to propose a new order based on cooperation between all states including Israel, no increase in oil prices, and an end to great power rivalries in the Middle East. He is even willing to pull Saudi Arabia out of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries or to let Israel join it. OPEC was necessary, according to Connery, to present a united front to Western oil companies which have "raped" the Middle East for 50 years: "There was no other way to convince the world to take us seriously." OPEC's voice has lately become confused, declares Connery, "It speaks in dark places, arranges arms deals, political-economic blackmail, terrorist raids, chooses sides, draws lines, and we lurch toward holocaust."

Those would seem to be unusual words coming from a real Saudi spokesman, but then more radical ideas have come out of the Arabian desert before. In any case, Connery's message seems pretty good to me, and perhaps someday the world will be ready for an Arab spokesman who calls for peace, shared resources and an end to terrorism.

Nevertheless, back in the film, the great powers are very disturbed by the Saudi proposals. The American delegation at the U.N. squirms exquisitely as Connery speaks. In a wonderful vignette that would seem to typify the mind-set of reporters who view the world through the prism of Kissinger backgrounders, the only question an American interviewer can think to ask Connery is if the State Department had prior knowledge of his speech.

The answer is no, but Director Michael Sarafian has already shown us the United States is not about to stand by idly in face of the threat that peace might break out in the Middle East. With Kuwait and some of the smaller Arab states already enlisted in the Saudi scheme, the CIA tells the National Security Council—or some such official body—that the implications could be "crippling" for the U.S. "There would be created a productive consortium competitive to our own," declares the earnest CIA briefer, "a vast apparatus against us in the marketing of petrochemicals."

"Then I would assume that steps are being taken to neutralize this plan."

"Yes, sir."

This last conversation is not so far-fetched. After all, the CIA promoted a violent coup d'etat in Iran in 1953 to prevent that country's oil resources from passing out of Western control. More recently, Henry Kissinger has darkly hinted that the U.S. might send in the Marines if OPEC oil policies posed an economic threat to the United States. As for American involvement in terrorism, the CIA ran an assassination program in Vietnam aimed at neutralizing the other side's political infrastructure, and it trained thousands of Cuban exiles in unconventional warfare tactics for its savage secret war against Fidel Castro.

In one of those shared Soviet-American interests that so please our Secretary of State, the Russians are also bitterly against the Saudi plan. The threat to them is not economic, according to the KGB, but loss of Soviet influence in the Third World.

"I assume you are considering counter-measures," says the Soviet leader. His KGB briefer, who does not look so different from his CIA counterpart, simply nods in agreement.

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